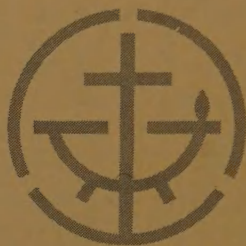


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Christianity and Personal Problems: No. 4

JESUS CHRIST

WHAT IS HIS SIGNIFICANCE?

BY

SHERWOOD EDDY

AUTHOR OF "FACING THE CRISIS," "THE NEW WORLD OF LABOR,"
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JESUS CHRIST¹

WHAT IS HIS SIGNIFICANCE?

Let us study in turn his character, his teaching, his unique relationships, the historic effects of his life; and the strange contrasts and paradoxes in which he seems to transcend his environment.² We shall then examine the otherwise broken arch of human experience, in the incomplete structure of science, philosophy, art, morality, and religion, to see if perchance he furnishes the key-stone and completion of life. We shall finally see if he meets the test of personal experience.

We have better records of the life of Jesus than of any character in ancient history. There is, moreover, a certain self-evidencing value in these narratives, a rugged, sober sincerity, a sense of reality, a straightforward honesty of purpose that makes its own appeal.

It may seem strange to some that Jesus was in any peculiar sense divine, but once granted a personal or loving God who desired to help men as his children or to manifest himself to them, how otherwise could he do so intelligibly, helpfully, and finally save in a human life like that of Jesus?

Let us begin, however, with him just as a man, and study his life and teaching.

JESUS' CHARACTER

How *strong* he was! Fiercely tempted for forty days, he returns triumphant, with power enough to help a defeated humanity. How fearlessly he stands before his enemies, undaunted, unswerving from the path of duty.

¹ Selections from Facing the Crisis, Chapters I and IX.

² As in the King James and Revised Versions, pronouns referring to God or Christ are not printed in capitals.

All the tyranny of Jewish legalism or of Roman imperialism could not crush him. Quietly and unafraid he moves to his appointed end. How strong is his hold upon men, as he calls them to leave home and kindred, ambition, possessions, all things, even life itself, to follow him. After sixty generations, his call is still the most commanding and imperative in human life, as he leads men to go for him to the heart of social injustice, or to the ends of the earth, to the jungles of Africa, to the limits of Asia, to tropic heat or arctic cold, to carry his transforming message of good news. Feeble and failing humanity has ever turned to him in its deepest despair and in its highest hope as "strong Son of God." Still we say, "Purest among the mighty, mightiest among the pure, whose pierced hand has lifted empires from their foundations, has turned the stream of history from its channel and still guides the ages." Does not his whole life leave upon us the impress of overmastering moral strength and spiritual power?

How *pure* and sinless he was! All the world's literature and all its sacred books contain the record of no other sinless character, and none was ever conceived or successfully portrayed in fiction. Every other great religious leader has passed through an experience of conversion, or a period of repentance. The best men have ever been most ready to confess their faults and failings, for "human piety begins with repentance." Jesus seems removed by a world from even the best of his followers, who like Peter cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man," or, like Paul, out of a tortured conscience of despairing legalism, "O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" Out of the depths of a seemingly sinless consciousness, unconvicted before man and unrepentant before the very presence of God, he calls the world to a standard of perfect purity—"Ye shall be perfect." He lays bare, as none other, the sin of the human heart; yet betrays consciousness of no guilt or shortcoming of his own. Who is this that calls a world to repentance, yet needs none himself; who prays, "Father forgive *them*," but never, "Father forgive *me*"?

After years spent in the daily intimacy of his presence, as he was pressed by the throng, wearied, persecuted, deserted, nailed to a felon's cross, these men who companied with him, who would go to death rather than accord divine honors to Cæsar or any other man living or dead, gave him in their thought and worship the supreme place as "Lord," as the very symbol of deity, as God revealed in a human life. His greatest enemy, Saul of Tarsus, finally sums up human experience in the words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

If God were to manifest himself in a human life, could it be more Godlike in moral purity?

And how *loving* he was! For three years we see him going about doing good, sharing his life with needy men in limitless self-giving, the greatest heart of all human history. None other ever compassed humanity, sounded the depths of its sin, swept the whole horizon of its sympathy. None other ever so loved the whole sordid world "unto the end." The multitude of the poor gathered about him as though drawn by a great human magnet. Little children strangely loved him as he took them in his arms and placed his hands upon them. It was the taunt of his enemies, but the glory of his character, that he was "the friend of sinners." He seems possessed by "the enthusiasm of humanity" that takes in the human race in its breadth and endless reach. And yet he loved each, one by one. He loves Peter, who breaks his heart, cursing and swearing as he denies him. He loves Judas as he stoops to wash the feet of his betrayer. Each in his presence felt the glow of his personal affection.

We see him in his last agony, exhausted under the Roman scourging, spit upon, nailed to a cross, reviled, rejected, hated, his life plans seemingly falling in wreckage about him, before the cynical hardness and hatred of impenitent Pharisees and Sadducees who were leading his people to destruction, yet crying, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Higher than this, our thought of love cannot reach. And herein is a Gospel

for humanity, a Good News for the race if we can believe that in this manifestation of unconquerable love, he was "the likeness of the unseen God," and that God was like Jesus. Could God himself be more loving if revealed in a human life?

This Jesus, strong, pure, and loving, stands before us, our very brother-man. We find in him, moreover, a wonderful balance and symmetry of character. Who is this young rabbi-carpenter, who lays aside his tools and goes out to call all men to be his brothers and children of his Father in Heaven?

Someone may say, Are we not all divine? If so, what is the difference between Jesus and ourselves? Yes, I know that God is in me—as a sinner that is being saved. But God was in Jesus as a Saviour of sinners. Every human being is created in the image of God. The Father and his children share a common life. God, Jesus, and all mankind are spiritually akin, for God is immanent in all. Jesus represents the fullness, the completion, the supreme manifestation of the immanence of God in human life. There is a moral world of difference between the best of his followers, who cries that he is "the chief of sinners," and him who can say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," "Come unto me and I will give you rest."³

Think also of his spiritual finality. Jesus is never out of date. He is humanity's eternal contemporary. If he were merely a good man, a well-meaning carpenter of Galilee, an unlettered peasant, we ought now, after nineteen centuries of progress, to be turning out from Oxford and Cambridge, Yale and Harvard, Paris and Berlin, better men than Jesus. Concerning what other historic character could we transfer his every attribute to God without a sense of blasphemy, and dare to say God was

³ "We should expect that God would manifest himself in such a soul for the guidance and salvation of men. When we turn to the records of Jesus Christ we are enabled to look into his soul; and there for the first time the immanence of God becomes a transparent reality. The distinctive marks of his consciousness as compared with ourselves and the best of men are three: 1. He is not conscious of sin. 2. He enjoys an unclouded communion with God; he and his father are never separated in will or act. 3. He alone exists, only to save and serve humanity." R. F. Horton, "My Belief," p. 109.

like him? If we can be sure that God eternally is, what Jesus was here on earth, this is for us an eternal Gospel. Think of a God as loving as Jesus, with as tender a personal care, marking the sparrow's fall, numbering, as it were, the hairs of our heads. Think of a God like Jesus in his moral distinctions, hating hypocrisy and sin, yet loving the sinner. In his moral attributes what more can we conceive of God? And let us remember that in the question of Jesus' divinity, it is not a mere estimate of an historic person that is at stake, but the character of God himself, our way of construing the universe, our attitude to humanity, the meaning and destiny of life itself. Your casual opinion or estimate of Socrates or Buddha, of Bacon or Shakespeare matters little; but what you think of and do with Jesus becomes for you the test of life and the touch-stone of destiny. For he is the moral ideal realized. Who is this who so affects or determines our relation to God and man, to life and destiny?

JESUS' TEACHING

He has enlarged for mankind the conception of God, of man, of duty, and of destiny.

Jesus enlarged our conception of *God*. He purified, unified, vitalized, and raised it to its highest power. He made God as Father real to humanity. The idea of God had been to the philosopher a postulate, an hypothesis, a first cause, an explanation, or an abstract absolute. In religion, the full realization of God had been prevailingly perverted or confused, by animism, polytheism, pantheism, enslaving legalism and a chaos of conflicting ideas and superstitions. Jesus gathered all the spiritual thoughts and experiences of men into one glorious and vital unity of God as Father. He so introduces us to God, so shares his experience with us, and so makes us acquainted with him that God becomes for us the central certainty of all life.

Jesus teaches the inestimable worth of *man* as God's child, made in his image, capable of fellowship with him, with the expanding power of an endless life. For him every man is of incalculable spiritual value, worth all the

love of God and worthy of his own infinite sacrifice. Emerson tells us that one alone knew the worth of a man. In all previous history man had been cheap, enslaved, exploited, slain by thousands in battle, offered on the altars of the lust, cruelty, and greed of his fellow-men. Jesus alone measures his full worth in the purpose of God. In the light of his teaching even the lowest slave becomes "the brother for whom Christ died."

The modern world has confirmed the estimate he placed upon man. He taught the native spiritual equality and democratic right of opportunity of all men, and as Benjamin Kidd reminds us, "around this doctrine every phase of the progressive political movements in our civilization has centered for the last two centuries."

He lifts our conception of *duty*. He raises man's life to new moral heights of possibility and places a new ethical ideal before humanity. And yet this humanly impossible standard seems natural to him and, in his presence, possible for us. He makes us joyously confident to dare the humanly impossible. Fearlessly he sweeps aside or criticizes as inadequate the most authoritative known standards of morality with his moral imperative, "I say unto you." He places clear and firm before us, as an Alpine snow peak, moral altitudes which without him are inaccessible.

In his call to duty, reinforced by the categorical imperative of conscience within, and the moral order of the universe without, we seem to hear the very voice of God. Who is this that stands at the moral summit of the centuries?

He creates a new conception of *destiny* as he flings wide before us the entrance to endless life. He offers no labored proof nor cold argument for immortality. In place of the guesses and gropings and wavering uncertainties of the philosophers, he gives the sure and blessed hope of an eternal life already begun here on earth. He offers no mere selfish personal blessing in a future heaven, but the mighty concept of God, man, and duty united and realized in a universal and eternal Kingdom of God, here and hereafter. Reinhard bases the argument for his

divinity solely upon this conception of the Kingdom. Who is this unlettered Galilean peasant who proposes a Christian social order involving the moral organization of all mankind? His concept embraces a sphere so wide that it is confined by no Pharisaic sect or clique or Jewish prejudice, but would embrace all men of all races and all religions. Here is a kingdom already within us yet endless as the ages, high as the purpose and plan of God and deep as human need and sin. Royce asks where we can find "a cause, all-embracing, definite, rational, compelling, supreme, certain, and fit to centralize life." To whom shall we go, save to him who flings this challenging program before us as the highest conceivable goal for humanity?⁴

How high is Jesus' ethical standard! What a breadth and sweep it embraces, appealing equally to Orient and Occident, to wise and ignorant, rich and poor, to men of all races, all ages and generations alike! And how adaptable it is; not cramped or confined in rigid rules, but spacious in eternal principles, motivated by love, freed by the concept of liberty, containing the element of progress, and mighty with the dynamic of divine power. How final is his moral imperative! How much have twenty centuries added to his ethical standard? His word seems to stand complete and final in eternal truth.

Who is this young carpenter-rabbi, this peasant who sits on the hillsides of Galilee and proclaims eternal truth for humanity, to whom we turn today with the affirmation, "To whom else shall we go? Thou hast the words

⁴Mr. H. G. Wells, in a recent article on the six greatest men in history, says of Jesus, "His is easily the dominant figure in history. . . . A historian without any theological bias whatever, should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to a penniless teacher from Nazareth. . . . A historian like myself finds the picture centering irresistibly around the life and character of this simple, lovable man. . . . The permanent place of power which he occupies is his by virtue of the new and simple and profound doctrine which he brought—the universal loving Fatherhood of God and the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is one of the most revolutionary doctrines that has ever stirred and changed human thought. . . . The world began to be a different world from the day that doctrine was preached."—*The American Magazine*, July, 1922, p. 14.

of eternal life"? To whom shall we turn for the ultimate spiritual standards of life? To Moses or Isaiah, to Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed? Can we find the full spiritual meaning of life unfolded by Socrates, by Plato or Aristotle, by Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus, by Kant or Hegel, by Dante or Shakespeare, by Nietzsche or Haeckel? To whom else can we turn for life? Who, other than Jesus, completes the whole sweep of our thought of God, of man, of duty, and of destiny, and unifies them in one eternal Kingdom of Love?

HIS UNIQUE RELATIONSHIPS

If we read afresh the records of his life, it seems evident that Jesus stands in a unique relation both to God and to man. We shall confine our references here to the first three gospels.⁵ Whether we examine the claims he is reported to have made, or those made for him by his followers, or the overwhelming impression he made upon his contemporaries, or the functions he fulfills, he actually brings God to man and man to God. He is the supreme revelation of God and the Saviour of man.

⁵ We have better manuscripts, both as to quality and quantity, written nearer to the events described, than we possess of any other ancient character or writer. Of the plays of Eschylus we have some fifty manuscripts, none of them complete; of Sophocles about a hundred, but only seven of value; of Euripides, Cicero, and Virgil, some hundreds. But of the four Gospels and of the New Testament in the original Greek, we have over three thousand manuscripts and, with their ancient translations, more than twelve thousand copies to consult. Moreover, these stand chronologically nearer the events they record than the manuscripts of the classics. The earliest manuscript we have of Sophocles was written fourteen hundred years after his death; of Euripides, sixteen hundred years, and of Plato, thirteen hundred years after he lived. Of Virgil, the best of the classics, we have no extant manuscript written within a hundred years as near the lifetime of the author as in the case of the New Testament manuscripts. Of the manuscripts of Aristotle, we have only those written within two and a half centuries of his death. Yet none of us seriously doubts the worth and authenticity of these classic writers. We have their essential message and can estimate its value. As John Stuart Mill well says, "It is of no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable may have been added by the traditions of his followers. Who among them was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels?" Cf. Bishop Welldon, *Nineteenth Century*, October, 1907.

In his relation to God, he alone fully knows God and completely reveals him. "All has been handed over to me by my Father: and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."⁶

In his relation to man, he is the Messiah of the Jews, the hope of Israel, the light of the Gentiles, prophesied through the centuries. John the Baptist, of whom it was said that there was "none greater born of woman," is less than the least in his new Messianic Kingdom. According to the records, this claim to Messiahship he repeats in the face of death. He is the fulfiller of the law and the prophets, of the Old Covenant which culminates in him, and by his death he inaugurates a New Covenant of grace and truth, which supersedes the law of Moses. He turns a new page of history for all mankind and men date their documents and divide time by his birth. Events for us are determined temporally by this relation to him, B.C. or A.D.; "before Christ," or "in the year of our Lord."

As Son of Man, he is the representative of a new humanity. As Saviour, he comes to seek and to save the lost among men. He satisfies the human heart. Who is this that is able to say, "Come unto me, all who are laboring and burdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find your souls refreshed; my yoke is kindly and my burden light."⁷

Who but the very Master of the heart would dare to say, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father"? "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, aye and his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine: whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me, he cannot be a disciple of mine." He is greater than John, "greater than Jonah," or the prophets of the Old Testament, "greater than

⁶ Matt. 11: 27.

⁷ Matt. 11: 28-30. Moffatt's Translation.

Solomon" in all his glory, greater than David, Israel's greatest king, who calls him "Lord."

By his standard men will be judged. The destiny of men will be according to what they do to him as he identifies himself with all humanity, even in the least of these his brethren. His glad tidings of life are to be proclaimed to all the world, and even the loving act of an outcast woman, who breaks an alabaster cruse of ointment and anoints his weary feet, shall be told with the telling of his good news in distant climes to the end of time. Have not the centuries borne out these sweeping and stupendous claims?

As the writer has traveled among the students of more than twenty countries for many years, he has observed one supremely significant movement in the religious realm extending around the world. In the spiritual sphere the world is being very slowly but surely Christianized. The student world is not being converted to Buddha, to Confucius, or to Mohammed. There is a "World's Student *Christian* Federation." There is no World's Student Buddhist, Confucian, Mohammedan, or Hindu Federation. Christ only is becoming supreme in the spiritual sphere, and there is no other to whom the students of the world are turning in spiritual hunger to find a rational and vital relation to God in personal renewal and social redemption.

Are the statements of the unique relationships of Jesus being fulfilled or disproved by the centuries? Does he seem to speak as a misguided enthusiast? As we test these claims pragmatically, does he or does he not actually in experience bring God to man? Does he or does he not bring man to God, as throughout the centuries he saves the sinful? Who is this who stands in unique relation to God and man, claimed or implied on almost every page of the narrative, varied in a hundred phrases and figures, and interwoven with his acts and teachings?

THE HISTORIC EFFECTS OF HIS LIFE

Have the centuries since Jesus lived been proving or disproving his claims? What has been done toward the

abolition of slavery, the uplift of childhood, womanhood, manhood? What has been done for the sick, the poor, the ignorant, and the sinful that is traceable to his influence?

Slavery was first mitigated and finally abolished by the progressive application of the principles of Jesus, in spite of the long defense of the system by some of his misguided followers because of their vested interests. When Jesus entered the world slavery was practically a universal institution. He gave mankind a new conception of God as Father, of man as brother, and of life conceived under a new principle of liberty. Within a century the condition of slaves had been ameliorated in Rome. Chiefly as the result of the agitation of his followers slaves were finally freed in every Christian country and ultimately even in the dark continent of Africa.

Womanhood has been uplifted through his influence.⁸ Among the five hundred million women of over half the human race in the continents of Asia and Africa, under the ethnic religions, not one has to the full her God-given rights, apart from the application of the principles of Jesus. Jesus gave for all time a new status to womanhood. Under the influence of his teaching, monogamy became gradually prevalent, marriage was held sacred, sexual morality was lifted to a higher plane and the home possessed a new sanctity. Woman, who for centuries had been the toy or drudge of man, was increasingly given her rightful place in religion, in education, in art, in law, in all life.

The sick have been cared for and a vast ministry of healing has come down the centuries and extended to the limits of the world under the influence of his teaching and example.

The poor have been uplifted. Even the exalted Plato

⁸ Even Plato believed in a community of wives. Aristotle ranked woman between man and the slave. Confucius, in his own unhappy home, never fully conceived of the worth of womanhood, nor saw the high sanctity of marriage. Buddha gave thanks that he had not been born in hell, as vermin, or as woman. In Hinduism, the code of Manu permitted woman no equal place with man. Under Islam, with its polygamy, its slavery, and its sensuous conception even of heaven, a blight has fallen upon womanhood.

says that "the poor should be expelled from the markets and the country cleared of that sort of animal." But Jesus offers comfort to the oppressed, and boldly arraigns the selfish rich. His gospel is a good news for the poor. The record of the ministry of his true followers to them would fill many volumes; from the sharing of their possessions in their early enthusiasm for humanity even to the present day they have continued Jesus' compassionate work for the multitudes. He calls not only for the palliatives of charity, but for fundamental social justice for all.

The ignorant have been enlightened and uplifted by his teaching and by the application of his principles to life. Jesus sought to make men whole in mind, as well as in body. The introduction of Christianity with the translation of the Bible proved a powerful educational factor in the civilization and progress of the half-barbarous peoples of early Europe. Under the missionary impulse of Christ's teaching, more than two hundred languages have been reduced to writing among savage tribes in Africa and isolated portions of the globe, and Christian schools and colleges have been founded by thousands in scores of lands.

The sinful have been saved, and spiritual regeneration has been experienced by multitudes who have sought to follow Jesus' way of life. His work of moral uplift has steadily gone forward in individuals, in nations, and in human society. Can anyone deny that his influence has been the chief factor in the moral renewal and spiritual transformation of men for the last nineteen hundred years?

After tracing through the centuries the results of his life and teachings upon slavery, upon the uplift of childhood, womanhood, manhood; upon the sick, the poor, the ignorant, the sinful, and upon all classes and conditions of men; then ask if his influence has not done more to regenerate mankind than all other influences combined.⁹ If so, do not the cumulative historic effects of his life

⁹ As Mr. Lecky shows, those "three short years have done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of the philosophers and all the exhortations of the moralists."

tend increasingly to show that he was the supreme revelation of God?

HE TRANSCENDS HIS ENVIRONMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

Men are usually made by their environment, limited by the circumstances of their lives. In some strange way Jesus transformed and transcended the limitations of his life. In the factors that contribute to the making of a man, we may study his race and family, his time and place, his education and opportunity. We might note how Jesus rises above them all.¹⁰

He had no wide human opportunity of culture or travel. He was no versatile Greek nor cosmopolitan Roman, no citizen of Athens or Alexandria, but lived his life in the isolation of village farmers and fishermen. Yet no one in all history has such strange power of self-identification with all mankind—with the suffering, the poor, the sinful, with little children, with men and women in all walks of life, in all times, in all nations. All claim him as theirs and seek to vindicate their position by appeal to his standards.

Who then is this who seems ever to rise above the narrowing, cramping limitations of a peasant carpenter, with a life transcendent, universal, and divine?

In spite of all these limitations, how overwhelming was the impression he made upon his contemporaries. Jesus had come to have for them the value of God because he performed the function of God. So overmastering is this impression that Jesus makes, that even where men cannot philosophically or theologically account for the mystery of his person, he yet commands and compels them by his constraining love, as they say,

"If Jesus Christ is a man,—
And only a man,—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to Him
And to Him will I cleave always.

¹⁰ See "Maker of Men," G. S. Eddy. Also "My Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," by J. Frank Manly.

"If Jesus Christ is a God,—
And the only God,—I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air!"

One test of truth is to assume the opposite and see where such an hypothesis leads us. Let us suppose that Jesus was only a good man, a well-meaning carpenter of Nazareth, but not the supreme revelation of the Father and quite mistaken in his conception of a loving, personal God. Whither does such a view lead? It would leave us with a Christless God, unmanifested and unknown. For if God was not as fully revealed in him as is possible within the limits of a human life, then he is nowhere adequately manifested. Like the men of Athens, we would be left worshiping at the altars of an "unknown God." If in Jesus we may know what God is like, all life is immovably centered, and in him we have seen the very "portrait of the invisible God." If in his cry on Calvary, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," we see not the very love of God, then we are not sure of that love and we are left with an unmanifested God. It is not primarily a question of what honor we would do to Jesus, or to what category we would assign him, but it is our conception of God himself and our relation to him that is at stake.

If the beautiful teaching of Jesus was only the mistaken groping after truth of a pious carpenter, then what probability have any of us of finding ultimate truth? What kind of God does it leave us with if the world's highest spiritual progress for the last nineteen centuries has been based upon an untruth? Has the consensus of opinion of the Church throughout the centuries been false? If the lower view of Jesus as in no unique sense divine is true, why, when thoroughly tested over and again, has this interpretation so repeatedly failed? From the second century to the present a few have ever held this view. Yet it has never been able to hold the heart of humanity. It has never offered a glowing hope to man nor roused him to a mighty enthusiasm. It has not produced the

noble army of martyrs nor the solid phalanx of the missionary host. Who has it sent to die in Africa to uplift savage tribes? It seems to have no message for the Dark Continent. The missionaries of the world today, like the martyrs of the early Church, are motivated by the constraining love of a Divine Son of God, a living Christ, and a Saviour who saves. The Church through nineteen centuries has stood in solidarity and in historic continuity with the record of the Gospels, the unswerving belief of the Epistles, and the witness of his contemporaries in the faith of the Son of God.

HE IS THE COMPLETION OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

He completes the broken arch of *science*. Science is rearing before us a vast temple of human learning. Through centuries of toil, by patient investigation it rises upward. The arch of science ascends toward one central truth that would complete the span of knowledge and make it whole. But, as Harnack shows, "to the questions of why, whence and whither, science can give no answer." Descriptive science classifies that which is and has been. Jesus unfolds that which is not yet fully realized in the natural order, but is yet to be. The question of final harmony, in an all-embracing principle which shall reconcile all differences, lies beyond science, but must be man's quest.

The writer spent an evening recently, during a student conference at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, looking through the great Yerkes telescope, the largest of its kind in the world. We turned the superb instrument on the star Vega, from which the light that reached us that night had been on its way, the astronomer told us, for fifty years, though traveling at the rate of seven times around the earth in a second. Next we turned the instrument upon a nebula from which the light now reaching us had started before Washington was born; then upon a neighboring group of four suns, from which their present light had been coming from before the time of Columbus. But in another quarter there was a dim spot of light which contained myriads of stars and a Milky Way of

suns as vast in extent as all the stars visible in our sky, from which the light that reached us that night had been on its way for over a million years. Here was vastness of space and power that staggered the imagination. Yet neither telescope nor microscope nor all the investigations of science can of themselves interpret the spiritual meaning of life for us. This is the work of Jesus. If his interpretation of God and man and the purpose of life is true, all is complete and we see life whole and lit with meaning.

Is he not also the keystone of *philosophy*, which has sought in vain throughout the centuries for some final principle to explain and unify its world, to find it indeed a uni-verse and not a multi-verse, a cosmos and not a chaos, with complete and adequate meaning. And yet philosophy itself can only find the crown and completion of life in a loving, intelligent will, in such a revelation of the source and ground of existence as we find in Jesus Christ. Are any of the systems of philosophy, or all combined complete without his interpretation of life, or are they sufficient without a loving God such as Jesus reveals?¹¹

He is the keystone of *art*. Art strives to realize and interpret some final ideal, some absolutely satisfying object. It seeks the contemplation of perfect beauty. Its quest is some image adequate to express the world's ruling principle. Where do we find this? Only in Jesus do we see the final symbol and image of God, the satisfying object of contemplation and worship which incomplete human art must ever crave.

¹¹ Cf. William Temple, in "Men's Creatrix," pp. 1-4, 258-259, 351-354. "We see how science and art and ethics and the philosophy of religion present converging lines which though converging can never by the human mind be carried far enough to reach their meeting point, but that that meeting point is offered in the fact of Christ. Here is the pivot of all true human thought; here is the belief that can give unity to all the work of mind. The creative mind in man never attains its goal until the creative mind of God, in whose image it was made, reveals its own nature and completes man's work. Man's search was divinely guided all the time, but its completion is only reached by the act of God himself, meeting and crowning the effort which he has inspired."—Page 354.

He is the keystone of *morality*, which demands a life of love and fellowship. But for the realization of such a life some adequate power is needed to regenerate the individual, to create an ideal society, and to bind it together in love. This we find in Jesus alone, the Saviour of the individual and the founder of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom gives us the ultimate social ideal involving the moral organization of mankind, united by the motive of love.

And lastly, he is the keystone of *religion*. For the last five thousand years of human history, recorded on the monuments of Egypt, written in the sacred books of the East, and witnessed still in the vast multitudes of weary pilgrims in their search for truth throughout Asia and other lands, religion has ever been seeking rest in a God of absolute power and love. Apart from Jesus Christ, man seems to feel himself separated from God and his fellow-men by his own sin and ignorance. Christ alone completely bridges this gulf of separation, calls man back to God, reconciles him with his brother, and completes the arch of religion, in a God of power and love equal to the whole world's need. Thus all human experience, in science, philosophy, art, morality, and religion, is like an arch in one grand temple of humanity, as yet broken and incomplete, needing but the single keystone of Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation of one infinite, loving, intelligent Will to complete the span, to enable us to see life steadily, and see it whole. As Browning says:

"I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in this world and out of it,
And has, so far, advanced thee to be wise."

HE MEETS THE TEST OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Jesus' teachings and claims may be submitted not only to objective historical examination, but to subjective verification. By their fruits we may know them. We may put to the test the question whether Jesus was the supreme revelation of God or not, by asking whether he alone

fully meets the three spiritual needs of life—for the past, the present, and the future. The writer desires to speak here personally and with perfect frankness. For the past I need forgiveness and the sense of reconciliation; for the present I need deliverance in the midst of an overwhelming moral conflict; for the future I crave a sure and certain hope that life has adequate meaning and a moral purpose here and hereafter.

I look back on a *past* of failure and of guilt that entails suffering to myself and to others. And that inexorable past I cannot re-live or undo. Yet in some strange way Jesus breaks the entail. He sets me free from my feeling of guilt for the harm I have done to my own and other lives in the irretrievable past, he gives me a sense of utter forgiveness, with a clear conscience and a new moral attitude of inward freedom. Somehow, whether I can explain it or not, I have found a new beginning of life through him who claimed authority to say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

He meets my spiritual need in the *present*. I find myself in a death-grapple with moral evil which is reinforced by sinful habit and heredity. The temptations of sense, the allurements of the flesh, the gravitation of the lower nature within are too strong for me. But here is one who in some strange way has actually set men free from the bondage of passion and made them victors in the moral struggle. Saul of Tarsus, speaking from the bitterness of long years of bondage, is but voicing the sense of defeat of the rest of us, and even of the great moral leaders of the race when he says, "The good that I would, I do not. O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Yet he becomes the glad follower of Jesus, and is able to say, "The law of the spirit of life in Christ has set me free from the law of sin and of death." Out of this experience he was able to carry the dynamic of personal spiritual life to the continent of our savage ancestors in Europe.

Jesus alone has had such an assurance of the *future* that he could share it with the human race. The bulk of mankind has been held under religions of fear, where

dread or superstition dominate life. The contagious certainty of Jesus in the absolute goodness of God substitutes faith for fear. He introduces men to God so that they become at home with him. His introduction leads to life-long friendship. His message is a good news and a great hope. Fear is the expectation of coming evil. But all contingencies are covered, and all possibilities of evil can be worked together for good to those who follow his way of life. He promises not only personal immortality, but the final consummation and triumph of good over evil, of right over wrong, in an eternal Kingdom of Good Will. The spiritual hopes of an enlightened humanity today are centered in him and derived from him.

For myself I try to think of what life would be to me without Jesus Christ, but I find it impossible to extricate myself or my conception of life from him. Life has now become so interwoven and bound up with him that it is inconceivable without him. I find it difficult to imagine the sun blotted out of the heavens, or the landscape of life with the light of eternal faith, hope, and love faded from its sky. I find it intellectually almost impossible to conceive of life as godless, for he is to me a presence that is not to be put by, and in him I live and move and have my being. But if I were to force myself to conceive of Jesus and his faith in the loving Father as torn from me, what then? Even then I could not turn to materialistic atheism because I could not summon enough credulity to embrace its irrational conceptions, but I would be left with a soulless and impersonal pantheism, with a God who did not and could not care. Upon such a God I would turn my back, and even if Jesus were deluded and mistaken, I would render my last homage to this Galilean carpenter dying amid the wreck of his dreams and ideals with the prayer upon his lips, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." I would worship this defeated man as higher far, and holier, than a loveless God. But Jesus, and faith and love in human life, are evidence of the love of God, and the faith we have received from him is daily validated in an experience that is slowly making and remaking us, as it made him.

Oh for words, for thought, for life fine enough to tell what Jesus is! For twenty-eight years I have worked among the students of Asia, America, and Europe. I was with the men at the front in the British and later in the American army. I saw much of human life in that "hell" called war. In evangelistic meetings and in personal interviews I have seen something of men under all the great religions of the world. My own work has been so shallow and superficial with such measure of failure that I have often been ashamed to continue in a service that so failed to rise to such an opportunity. But East and West, among rich and poor, students and the depressed classes, I have seen something of life. I have known something of doubt and disappointment and the loss of earthly loved ones. But in all life I have found one central reality, one foundation for faith, one experience that interprets life and makes it whole. I have found one Person who brings me into right adjustment in the three ultimate relationships of life, with God, with myself, and with my fellow men; one who is my very life. It is Jesus.

Others may philosophise and better define him, but I have known him in my own soul since first I knew what real life was. And I have seen him saving wrecked humanity in a score of nations, in many religions among all classes and conditions of men. I have little interest in metaphysical speculation and no craving for orthodox propriety, but for myself as I face this man I say with all the allegiance of my soul, My Lord! And my God manifest in human life!

Let us now sum up the evidence and ask what is the significance of Jesus. Think of the *character* of Jesus, strong, pure, and loving. Recall the moral discovery of his *teaching* of God as Father, of man as brother, of duty as the revealed will of God, of destiny realized in his Kingdom. Think next of his *unique relation* both to God and to man. Here is one who is able to bring God to man and man to God, who is both Son of God and Son of Man, supreme revelation of God and Saviour of humanity, the touchstone of destiny, the standard of

judgment, and the hope of eternal life. Think then of the *historic* effects of his life, whether or not he has fulfilled his claims and has made God real to multitudes of men. Think of the effects of his life on society, the influence of his teaching on the abolition of slavery, on the uplift of childhood, womanhood, manhood; the healing of the sick, the relief of the poor, the realization of social justice, the enlightenment of the ignorant, the saving of the sinful. Recall the strong contrasts and paradoxes of his life in which he transcends his limitations and his environment. Contemplate the vast temple of human knowledge, and ask if he is not indeed the *keystone* of the otherwise broken and incomplete arch of science, philosophy, art, morality, religion, and of all human experience. Put his claims to the proof and see if he meets the test of *personal experience* for the past, the present, and the future.

Who then is this? Can we deny that God was in him in some unique way? As we feel the influence of his life upon us, shall we not rise up at his call, "Come and follow me"? Not in abstract reasoning or empty theory, but in actual experience, as we seek to follow Jesus' way of life, we shall find him indeed the *supreme manifestation of God*.

OUR RELATION TO HIM

In a developing world we are faced by that strange contradiction of life called sin. There seems to be something wrong with us, a kind of inner cleavage, a rift at the very center of personality. There is a maladjustment of life, a contradiction between the ideal and the actual, between what I might be and what I am.

Sin would seem to be the living for partial ends and the assertion of my lower self, against the expression of my best and truest self in right relations with God and with my fellow men. It is living from the false center of one's isolated self, in correspondence with a lower material, and at times sensuous, environment. It is a break with the higher environment of the personality and a denial of the nobler possibilities of life. It is missing the mark. It is really a disease—the thriving of a lower parasitic form of life at the expense of the higher life.

For Christians, Jesus represents the embodiment of the supreme possibilities of the higher and better life. A Christian is just a follower of Christ, one who is honestly trying to follow Jesus' way of life. "A Christian is one who is responding to all the meanings which he finds in Christ." The first followers of Jesus knew little of orthodoxy, of creeds, or of conventional theological belief when they began to follow him. They were just simple learners or followers of Jesus, and that is all that we need to be.

For the Christian, all worthy aims are unified and find their driving power in supreme loyalty to Jesus and his cause. What is contrary to the ideals of Jesus, what will hurt his cause, whether in personal life, in business affairs, or in political relationships, the true Christian will avoid. What is in line with the ideals of Jesus, what will help forward his cause, to these a Christian will give himself with complete abandon. Seeking the Kingdom of God

and his righteousness now becomes the center of his life, and he finds all other true loyalties "added unto him," in relation to this supreme passion of his life.

Biologically, life may be described as a two-fold relation of action and reaction between the organism and its environment. It is always active toward two main results—hunger and love, self-maintenance and the continuance of the race, the struggle for life and the struggle for the life of others, self-realization and the realization of the life of the species. Before these two dominant instincts or capacities of life are fully developed, or if they are perverted, instead of hunger for life and its full realization, we have the manifestation of *selfishness*, or living for one's own partial ends, regardless of the welfare of others; and before love is developed as the full sharing of life for the mutual benefit of all, we have *lust*, the desire to possess for our own selfish, partial ends without regard to the worth and welfare of others.

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

It is the process, whether sudden or gradual, by which this loyalty to Jesus becomes the reality of a person's life. For some it represents a series of forward steps. For others, who have been living contrary to Jesus and his ideals, it means literally turning around, a change in the moral direction of life. When the lost son came to himself he decided to go back to his father. Conversion is a turning from the false center of self to the true center of God as revealed in Jesus; from a base selfishness to a true self-realization in life more abundant; from the false lust of anti-social life to the fullness of love as the complete sharing of life in limitless self-giving. For those who have grown up without relation to Jesus, conversion represents a change of spiritual center as radical as the shift from the earth as the false center of the Ptolemaic, to the true sun-centered Copernican system of astronomy. It is spiritual self-realization in the adjustment of the individual in the three relationships of life, religious, moral, and social. It is a new orientation to the spiritual universe. It is "the birth of a new dominant

affection by which the God consciousness hitherto marginal and vague becomes focal and dynamic."¹ Conversion means the unification of the divided self, or the victory of the true self in its identification with the ideal, as a house no longer divided against itself. This involves three results.

1. A new vision of God and of the meaning of the will of God in our life, resulting in a new sense of joy and power.

2. Christ once a fact of history becomes now a fact of conscience and of experience. The lower self as the habitual center of one's personal energy is segmented, objectified as the "tempter," rejected and denied, as in the struggle in the soul of every man dramatically described by Stevenson in his "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." The lower nature is now renounced and lurks without instead of dominating within.

3. A new enthusiasm for humanity, expressing itself in a life of service and sacrifice. The new man, for he is indeed "a new creature," is called not only to love God with all his heart or affection, with all his mind and thought, with all his strength and service, with all his soul or self, but he must love his neighbor as himself. The individual and the social aspects of the Christian life become the two poles of a current of full power, two coördinate hemispheres of the one full orbéd reality of life.

The entrance to this new life may be either sudden or gradual, according to one's temperament, training or past life. If sudden the "new man" looks with joy upon what seems to be a new world, in the words of Tagore, "The whole world was one glorious music and rhythm;" or as described in the record of John Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy,"

"Oh glory of the lighted mind
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
The station brook to my new eyes

¹ Saunders, "The Adventure of the Christian Soul."

Was bubbling out of paradise,
 The waters rushing from the rain
 Were singing Christ had risen again.
 I thought all earthly creatures knelt
 From rapture of the joy I felt."

Professor James, in his "Varieties of Religious Experience," defines conversion as the process by which "a life hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy, becomes united and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firm hold on religious realities."²

Multitudes of lives have found the reality of this experience, like those recorded in Harold Begbie's "Broken Earthenware," forming in every age continuous additions to the Acts of the Apostles. As Pascal says, "that which happened to Jesus Christ is transacted in the soul of every Christian." Thousands, or rather millions have found the experience of General Booth, "The Holy Spirit had shown me that my real welfare for time and eternity depended upon the surrender of myself to the service of God. After long controversy I made this submission, cast myself on his mercy, received the assurance of his pardon, and gave myself up to his service with all my heart."

² Summing up a vast field of human history covering many centuries and all types of mind, Professor James comes to the following scientific conclusions as to the reality of religious experience:

1. "That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance.

2. "That union with or harmonious relation to this higher universe is our true end.

3. "That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects within the phenomenal world.

4. "Religion includes a new zest which adds itself like a gift to life.

5. "An assurance of safety and temper of peace and preponderance of loving affections."

"God thus becomes the supreme reality. We and God have business with each other, and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled. The universe takes a turn for the worse or better in proportion as each one of us fulfills or evades God's demands."—"Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 485.

THE MEANS OF LIFE

As to the means of realizing this spiritual life, there are three common errors to be avoided. First of all, no man can get right within, merely by outward forms and ceremonies. Outward acts and forms have their place if they represent inward spiritual reality. But the essence of religion is an inward relationship, not an outward ceremonial. No mechanical or formal rite is a substitute for this inward transformation. The Pharisee thought he was saved by his outward institutions and privileges; by circumcision, the passover, the scrupulous tithing of petty trifles; he overlooked the great essentials of justice and mercy, of love for God and man.

Again, a man is not made right by purely selfish or legal good works to acquire merit. These have always been the first impulse of the natural man in every age and in every religion. But the inevitable failure of this method is evident in the very nature of the case. For religion, as we have seen, is not an attainment but an attitude, not the making of a record but the making of a man, not a series of Pharisaic meritorious works, but the loving personal relationship of a son to a Father. Many a modern man, who never dreams that he is himself a Pharisee, sets up some subjective or arbitrary standard of his own of outward morality and because he is better than some others around him, or has done "about as near right as he can," thinks he has all the religion he needs. He forgets that religion is not only doing right, but being right, with God, with one's self, with one's fellow men.

A third error is avoided if we remember that religion does not consist in the pride of knowledge, nor in dead and formal "faith without works," nor in mere orthodoxy of belief. It is not outward familiarity but inward response that determines religious reality. We are rightly related to God by faith alone, but true faith is never alone, it always manifests itself in works. Faith is the root, works are the fruit; faith is the cause, works are the result.

On God's side life is the giving of a gift, on our part

the receiving of it. But the gift God gives is himself, not a thing, an emotion, an experience, or transaction; and our response is just the giving of ourselves to him. Jesus, however, did not speak of this experience as of a deep theological mystery, but as the simplest and most natural thing in the world. In the first gospel he is recorded as speaking of it under such natural figures as simply entering a door or gate, accepting an invitation to a glad wedding feast, turning to God with the teachable spirit of a little child. In the second gospel it is just believing a piece of good news, following a person in fellowship and service, with the resultant healing of a divided, broken personality so that life is made "whole" with all its powers restored. In the third gospel the experience on God's side is likened to the finding of a lost sheep by a shepherd or a lost coin by its owner, and on the man's side to the return of a lost son to his father. In the fourth gospel it is the receiving of a person as an indwelling guest in the heart, or, to an ignorant woman, it is likened to taking a drink to quench the thirst of life.³ Only once to a theologian does he speak of the mystery of being "born from above," and after all what more is that, on the human side, than just entering life, or beginning to live as a little child? Becoming a Christian is just beginning to be one, becoming a learner of Christ's teaching and a follower of his life.

The clearest teaching of all is that of the simple story of the son who lost his father. He was wrong with his father, with himself, with his family. He turned his back upon his father and his face to his own selfish love of sin. He was "lost" to his father, that is, he was away from the one to whom he belonged. Rags, swine, and harlots were only the outward symbols of the wrongs that started when he turned his back on his father, for he was equally wrong whether in rags or in respectability, with swine or with selfish Pharisees. Observe the manner of his return when he said, "I will arise and go to my father." He did not stay away to earn merit or become

³ See Matthew 7: 13, 18: 2, 22: 2. Mark 1: 15, 17. Luke 15. John 1: 12, 3: 16, 4: 10, 14, 5: 24, 10: 9, 10.

more respectable. And "he came to *himself*," for he had been living beside himself, or beneath himself, out of his true self. As the meaning of the word conversion implies, he simply turned around and came *home* to a new life of joy and service. As Francis Thompson puts it, in the Hound of Heaven,

"Ah fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest;
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me." •

This challenge must face every reader of these lines. Professor James, in his classic essay, "The Will to Believe," shows that every proposal to act comes to us in the form of an hypothesis. It may be an issue that is either living or dead; it may be one that is either forced or avoidable; it may be either momentous or trivial. The question that we now have before us is that of the very meaning of life, involving also the questions of the existence and nature of God, the value of Christ, the call of duty, of social obligation, and of human destiny. It is a living issue, it is unavoidable, and it is momentous. It affects character and destiny for time and eternity. It is for every man the supreme question, for upon it all the issues of life depend.

This, in a word, is the meaning of life. Has the reader taken this way for himself? Or, even as Jesus said, "He that saveth his life shall lose it," has he withheld himself for himself and his own selfish ends, in a life self-centered, divided, discordant, and wrong with God, with himself, and his fellow men? The significance of Jesus is as a means of life, to call men to a way of living, to enable men to realize for themselves the full meaning of life—a life made whole and at-one—with God, with oneself, and his fellow men. Whether we are beginning or continuing, his final word for each of us is, "This is the way of life. Come and follow it." "I am the way." "Come and follow me."

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